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NUTRITION COMMITTEE NEWS

For exchange of information on nutrition education and school lunch activities

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, Washington, D. C.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1963

FEB 26 1963

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NUTRITION EDUCATION CONFERENCE, 1962 -- EVALUATION AND FOLLOWUP

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The Nutrition Education Conference held in January 1962 brought together approximately 300 workers representating many different community groups and professional backgrounds. They met to consider a common problem—the nutrition of children. Such national conferences are valuable to the extent that conference information, activities, and recommendations reach the community level and make a difference there.

Many of our readers who have some responsibility for planning and evaluating nutrition programs and regional or State conferences have expressed an interest in the evaluation and followup activities of the Conference. They want to know both the method and results of evaluation and any evidence indicating that conference information and recommendations made a difference in the work being done at all levels—national, State, and local.

In this issue of NCN, we include a summary of the participants' evaluation of the Conference—both how it was done and the results—and a description of followup activities that have come to our attention.

PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION

Interviews

Several participants were asked to engage 8 to 10 persons in conversation during the 3-day series of sessions. The purpose of these interviews was to learn something of the general reaction of participants to the Conference as it progressed. Each interviewer was requested to write a short summary of the experience.

All interviewers felt that this was a good way to round out the specific information requested on the evaluation forms that all participants were asked to complete. Approximately 45 registrants were interviewed.

One interviewer felt that the method provided (1) an opportunity for frankness in discussing the program and (2) if begun with the first session of the Conference, the method had value in promoting critical analysis of ideas and a feeling of responsibility to participate.

Reports of other interviewers revealed that this was their experience also. Participants were sensitive to ideas and gave them critical attention. Reactions were as varied as the individuals interviewed. Everyone was interested and was thinking not only of the presentations they had witnessed but of the entire Conference in terms of what would be most meaningful to them.

Questionnaires

At the close of the final session, participants were requested to complete a second form. About one-third of the registrants—36 percent—responded. Essentially, two questions were asked. One was concerned with the ideas presented that participants felt they could take home and use. The second dealt with the way meetings were organized and the way the Conference, in general, was structured. Space was also allocated for listing any comments or suggestions.

Ideas worth trying—Participants, on the whole, reacted most favorably to the interdisciplinary approach to the solution of nutrition problems and indicated many ways they could see such an approach being used.

Almost every respondent indicated an idea or ideas that she believed would improve or strengthen specific activities either planned or underway at home. Thus, practically every idea presented by the speakers appeared on the evaluation form as worth inclusion in developing or conducting nutrition programs and projects.

Comments and suggestions.—Many indicated that although much of the information was not new to them, it was profitable to re-examine it, to note how well it had stood the test of time, and to consider how to implement wide dissemination and use of this sound information.

Most of the comments indicated that the obvious preplanning that went into the Conference resulted in a well-organized and smoothly-run series of meetings. Many indicated that more such conferences would be helpful. A few respondents believed that the good work already being done at State and local levels was not sufficiently recognized by the planning group.

For the most part, suggestions were directed to the mechanics of structuring the Conference. Several respondents noted that long afternoon sessions should have a break of some sort or at least a definite change of pace.

There were numerous suggestions concerning the small group discussions. Interestingly, very few suggested either omitting them completely or extending them appreciably. For the most part, respondents felt that the time allotted could have been used to better advantage within the groups and suggested that attention be directed to this end, another time. Most participants who were concerned about the group discussions felt that too much time was used in deciding on topics for discussion that would interest such a diversified group.

Nine months later—September.—A second questionnaire was sent to the participants to learn whether the experience was useful to them in a practical way.

Space was allocated for any comments or suggestions participants wanted to make in light of their experience since the Conference. A 41 percent response resulted. This was 5 percentage points higher than that received at the close of the Conference.

Participants used information. — When questioned whether they had been able to use the content of speeches and discussions in their work, 64 percent of the respondents reported "Yes." They reported using the material in the following ways:

(1) Speeches—69%

(2) Consultant work in local situations—64%

(3) Writing papers or articles—52%

(4) Working with students—37%

(5) Choosing topics for panels—35%

(6) Other—24%

The chief "other" use reported was in preparing educational materials.

Conference materials and ideas shared.—Participants acquainted interested workers all over the country with the Conference by providing summaries—either oral or written—for State and local groups.

Many ideas have been used in (1) the preparation of special publications, (2) various types of in-service education, (3) developing the educational aspect of the School Lunch Program, (4) the preparation of visuals, and (5) reaching people through the various mass media.

The "team" or interdisciplinary approach was used in organizing or reorganizing community groups to work on common problems dealing with nutrition.

Program planning.—Ideas from all the presentations have been used in planning meetings or programs. These have been concerned with the nutritional problems encountered at every stage of the life cycle, and with such problem areas as nutrition and dental health and the widespread neglect of breakfast.

Many reported working on committees concerned with nutrition and physical fitness, with emphasis on nutrition as it relates to the program of the President's Council on Youth Fitness.

Comments.—From the comments on this last evaluation form, it would appear that participants generally were finding the experience a profitable one. Many commented favorably on the meeting of nutrition committee members held at the time of the annual meeting of the American Home Economics Association, at which reports of follow-up activities of the Conference were given (NCN September-October 1962).

Others indicated their interest in the (October) "Share and Compare" session of the American Dietetic Association's annual meeting. State and local followup activities of the Conference were to be reported.

ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION

A study of the information in the formal and informal evaluations of the Conference indicates that:

(1) Many groups in communities are interested in, and concerned with, the nutritional problems of people, particularly those of children. Some groups include persons professionally trained in nutrition and some do not.

(2) It is possible to bring representatives from these groups together to consider this problem of common interest — the nutrition of children — even though backgrounds of the participants are highly diversified. Furthermore, a program can be developed that participants will find interesting and useful in their work, and opportunities can be provided for individual participation.

(3) Many activities would certainly have been initiated

and successfully conducted in communities. There are indications, however, that the Conference did meet needs of participants in such a way that Conference ideas were used to strengthen community activities. The best example of this is the increasing number of meetings, workshops, and programs reported that are cosponsored by two or more allied professional groups.

(4) Nearly one year later participants are impressed enough with the utility of the Conference to suggest with enthusiasm that another such meeting be planned later.

(5) Those who plan the next conference will need to give particular attention to guidelines for small group discussions to promote individual participation and best use of time.

FOLLOWUP

From the reports of participants we learn that ideas and emphases presented at the Conference are continually being used to add strength and depth to the good work that has been going on in many communities for some time. The requests for information, materials, and consultant help received by the staff of Nutrition Committee News (NCN) also indicate that special emphasis is being given to (1) developing better ways to use the mass media, (2) promoting on-going nutrition programs in schools, (3) providing in-service education in nutrition for elementary school teachers, (4) improving food habits of teenagers, and (5) cooperative activities with workers in allied professions.

Special Meetings

Many members of the Interagency Committee on Nutrition Education (ICNE) have participated in regional, State, and local meetings held to relay Conference information and materials to workers who could not attend.

Nutrition committee members met in June with members of the ICNE at the time of the annual meeting of the American Home Economics Association. At this time, reports on the followup activities in the States were given. The meeting was reported in detail in the September-October 1962 issue of NCN.

Share and Compare Session—Amerian Dietetic Association Annual Meeting.—Nutrition committee members attending the annual meeting of the American Dietetic Association in Miami Beach had an opportunity to meet with members of the ICNE. This "Share and Compare" session was a scheduled part of the program. Some 80 persons attended.

The theme of the session was "What Are Nutrition Committees Doing About Follow-Up of the 1962 National Nutrition Education Conference?"

Dr. E. Neige Todhunter presented highlights of the Conference. This was followed by a three-member panel that reported how ideas from the Conference were being used to strengthen and add interest in activities that were already going on.

Activities Reported by the Panel.—Nutrition forums for lay persons, recruitment activities to interest secondary school students in health careers, nutrition meetings at which teenagers participated in panel discussions, and surveys to gather information on which effective nutrition programs in schools could be based.

In the discussion that followed, representatives from several States reported (1) special meetings to review the Conference, (2) workshops on problems of food fads and misinformation, (3) meetings cosponsored by several professional groups, (4) publications to meet special needs of elementary school teachers, and (5) work of dietetic interns with nursery school children and their parents.

In closing, Dr. Todhunter made these pertinent points:

(1) Activities should be planned to meet local needs.

(2) No one group can do the job alone—cooperative activities with allied professional groups and industry-sponsored groups are essential.

(3) In working co-operatively, time must be taken to learn to work together—each group should understand objectives, procedures, and problems of other groups.

(4) Good "paperbacks" on the science of nutrition—written in popular style—are needed.

(5) More methods for teaching nutrition to people of all ages need to be developed, tested, and evaluated.

Publications

Government publications resulting from the Conference include the Proceedings, which are already in the hands of participants and are now available to the general public; and two issues of Nutrition Committee News—May-June 1962 and this issue (January-February 1963)—devoted exclusively to a summary of the meeting and to evaluation and followup activities.

A leaflet, *"You are not Alone in Nutrition Education,"* was published by the American Home Economics Association as a followup activity of the Nutrition Education Conference. This publication is designed to acquaint educators with the resources in the average community and the kind of help teachers can expect from them. It also includes some goals for elementary school nutrition programs, some ways that parents can help reinforce the work of the school, and some sound resource materials.

Professional journals, such as the "School Lunch Journal,"

"Journal of the American Home Economics Association," and many State publications, have published summaries presented at the Conference.

Industry-sponsored publications, such as Borden's "School Nutrition Topics," also have done feature articles on meeting highlights.

Other Projects or Activities

At the closing session of the Conference, Dr. E. Neige Todhunter expressed a hope for action in several areas including—development of sound materials, promotion of on-going, sequential school programs, examination and improvement of teaching methods, wider and better use of the mass media. The staff of Nutrition Programs Service, Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and members of the Interagency Committee on Nutrition Education have given attention to these suggestions and some action has resulted.

Nutrition and physical fitness.—A sequential program (K-12) for nutrition teaching in schools was suggested for inclusion in the guide for school health programs that is being developed by the President's Council on Youth Fitness. Nutritionists from the Departments of Agriculture and Health, Education, and Welfare served as consultants in the development of the nutrition section of this guide. The Council hopes to have this publication ready for distribution to schools in the near future.

Several nutritionists have also made contributions in this area by appearing on programs of State and National professional organizations. In every case they have emphasized the importance of nutrition to total fitness. A person can be well nourished and still not totally fit, but he can never be totally fit if not well nourished. It has also been pointed out that we can be encouraged by the potential for physical fitness found in today's youth. Perhaps our best area for study is in the development of motivating activities.

Nutrition work with teenagers.—A nutritionist participated in a pilot study with teenagers during which a method using a positive approach to wise food selection was presented. This method, which appeared promising, was described and discussed at a teenage workship attended by nutritionists, health educators, nurses, and home economics teachers, and later, with school personnel in four cities. Several persons working with teenagers offered to try the method in their situations to determine its usefulness. We hope to have descriptions of activities from these local situations to report at a later date.

Proceedings Now Available

The Proceedings of the Nutrition Education Conference, 1962, have been sent to participants. Single copies are available free to nonparticipants from Mrs. Margaret Morris, Nutrition Programs Service, Consumer and Food Economics Research Division, ARS, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D.C.; quantity supplies may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C. at $0.45 each.

Wider and better use of mass media.—Several members of Nutrition Programs staff have been working in this area. Steps have been taken to learn (1) how successful educational programs are developed for TV, (2) the cost in funds and staff time, and (3) the problems usually encountered. Television programs are complex and costly undertakings even when done on a small scale. These would be out of the question for agencies with restricted budgets or limited staff.

Nutrition information, however, continues to be disseminated on both educational and commercial TV. Commercial programs, of course, have by far the largest audience. Advertising, unfortunately, often takes information out of context, causing public confusion and misinterpretation. Nutritionists, invited to appear on commercial TV as guests on an established program with a continuing audience, have an opportunity to present accurate information to many people who would not select an educational program. Some nutritionists are doing this and appear to be making a good start toward wider and better use of one of the mass media.

Nutrition news that should reach both men and women is generally reported on the woman's pages of newspapers. Workers from the nutrition and allied professions appreciate this news coverage, but recognize that many women and most men do not read these pages.

If nutritionists giving press interviews would keep in mind the value of nutrition news appearing in the general news section, perhaps they would see opportunities to suggest such coverage. Nutrition information would then appear where more people are likely to read it. One USDA nutritionist had an opportunity to make this suggestion on a recent field trip. Her visit to the community and the content of her talk were reported in the general news section of two newspapers.

Consumer and Food Economics Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, in consultation with the Interagency Committee on Nutrition Education. (Printing approved by the Bureau of the Budget, May 22, 1958.)